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Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

Beverages: What's in your drink?

When we look at our eating habits often times we overlook one of the most important factors to our nutritional health. Drinking beverages is essential and a part of life. We drink for survival, for comfort and for entertainment.

As we age it is important to understand that we cannot rely only on our feelings of thirst. People can often confuse thirst with hunger and not drink enough to maintain the fluid that we need during the day. Research has shown as we age our rate of dehydration increases. Dehydration is often caused by the lack of thirst and because as we age our body water decreases by 15%.

Other areas that can lead to dehydration is decreased mobility (movement), swallowing problems, comprehension and communication problems. Temperature can also play a factor and increase fluid loss.

Prevention of dehydration is important to avoid health problems.

- Drink or offer fluids regularly through out the day.
- Keep a cup full of fluids with you all day
- Drink fluids with medications
- Concentrate on drinking enough and not just quenching your thirst.

The Institute of Medicine has set an adequate intake of 15 cups of fluid for men and 11 cups for women. This is not a daily target, rather a general guide. You will get about 20% of the fluid you need from food.



What Drinks are the best?

WATER

At least half of your fluids should come from WATER. If you need 12 cups of fluid a day then at least 6 cups of that should come from water.

Water is abundant, refreshing and provides what your body needs. It restores fluid lost through metabolism, breathing, sweating, and removal of waste. It comes from your tap and it cost pennies per glass. Water should be the beverage you drink most often.

It is impossible to set a single requirement for how much water the average person needs. Talk to your doctor or dietitian and they can help you calculate your fluid needs and determine the best amount to follow.

TEA and COFFEE

3-4 cups a day appears to be acceptable

Tea and coffee are the two most commonly consumed beverages. They are naturally calorie free, they contain antioxidants and flavonoids. However, adding cream, sugar, whipped cream and flavorings turns these healthy options to unhealthy options quickly. Many latte and Frappuccino's can increase your calorie intake from 400 to 1000 calories if you are not careful.

FAT-FREE AND LOW FAT DAIRY

Limit to an 8 ounce glass or two a day.

Dairy is a good source of protein, calcium and other essential micronutrients. Skim to 1.5% milk are the best choices as they contain less saturated fat. Make sure you are still eating calcium rich foods if you consume less dairy.

"DIET DRINKS"

Ideally avoid, or a maximum of 8 ounces to 16 ounces a day.

These drinks are sweetened with artificial sweeteners. Although sugar free they may contribute to weight gain and are not equivalent to the benefits of water.

CALORIE DRINKS WITH NUTRIENTS

Limit to 4 ounce glass a day

Fruit juices, sports drinks, vitamin-enhanced waters and alcoholic drinks contain some benefits, but they should be limited in our diets. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends no more than 4 ounces of 100% fruit juice as part of fruit intake. Vegetable juices is lower in calories but higher in salt. Sports drinks are really recommended for endurance athletes. Vitamin-enhanced waters are not necessary for those who take a daily multi-vitamins. Alcohol may have benefits but could be hazardous when mixed with medication.

CALORIE SWEETENED BEVERAGES

Ideally avoid, or a maximum of 8 ounces a day

These beverages are the least important and need to be limited to no more than 8 ounces a day. These beverages include sodas, smoothies, and drinks sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup or other high calorie sweeteners. They have little to no nutrient benefits.

References:

<http://www.h4hinitiative.com/everyday-hydration/how-your-needs-change-over-time/hydration-and-elderly>

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-drinks-full-story/>

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/ten-tips-make-better-beverage-choices>

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<http://chfs.ky.gov/dail/default.htm>